

THE VERMONT VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEM

Statewide vital registration began in Vermont in 1857, when the General Assembly passed a bill requiring that towns report to the Secretary of State all births, marriages, and deaths occurring in their jurisdiction. Prior to that time, some towns kept such records in order to resolve questions concerning the distribution and inheritance of property. Vital records, particularly death records, gradually became recognized as an important tool in studying the location and spread of epidemics. In 1896, the Legislature transferred responsibility for the vital statistics system to the newly formed Board of Health, the forerunner of the Vermont Department of Health. The Department of Health has retained this responsibility to the present day.

The Vermont vital statistics system monitors the following vital events: births, deaths, marriages, divorces and dissolutions, fetal deaths, and abortions. Each type of vital record follows a different path before being used to produce the statistics published here.

Births: When a birth occurs, the physician, midwife, or other birth attendant is required to complete a birth certificate and file it with the town clerk in the town of birth within 10 days. For hospital births, it is usually the medical records staff that enters the birth information into the Electronic Birth Registration System (EBRS) and prints the birth certificate. The birth certificate is recorded and filed in the town where the birth took place, and a certified copy is sent to the Department of Health.

Deaths: Although a physician is responsible for completing the death certificate, the job may be, and often is, delegated to the funeral director. Most of the information needed to complete the death certificate is obtained from the family of the deceased; however, the physician must complete and certify the cause of death information. Once a death record is completed in the Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS), it is registered and the death certificate is available to the town clerks for filing.

Marriages: When a couple wishes to marry in Vermont, they provide a town clerk with the information needed to complete the license. The couple takes the license to an officiant, who signs and dates it, and returns it to the town clerk. The town clerk records and files the certificate, and sends a certified copy to the Department of Health.

Divorces and dissolutions: A divorce certificate or certificate dissolving a civil union is initiated by a lawyer or other individual handling the divorce or dissolution. The certificate is filed with the court as part of the divorce or dissolution proceedings. The court keeps the certificate until the decree becomes final, usually three months after the court hearing. When the decree is final, the court clerk signs the certificate and sends it to the Department of Health for filing.

Fetal deaths and abortions: Reports of fetal death and induced termination of pregnancy (abortion) are sent directly to the Department of Health by the physician, hospital, or clinic that performs the procedure. By law, these reports are for statistical purposes only, are not public records, and are destroyed after five years.

The Department of Health also receives abstracts for Vermont resident births and deaths that occur in other states and in Canada. This allows the Department to do statistical analyses of vital events involving Vermont residents, including events which occurred outside of the state. All vital records received are data entered and stored electronically, and data from births and deaths which occur in Vermont is transmitted to the National Center for Health Statistics to become part of a national database.